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FM AMCONSUL GUANGZHOU

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1092  
INFO RUEHGZ/CHINA POSTS COLLECTIVE 0337  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 0871  
RUEHGH/AMCONSUL SHANGHAI 0271  
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 0272  
RUEHSH/AMCONSUL SHENYANG 0281  
RUCPDOC/USDOC WASHDC 0022  
RHMFIS/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHINGTON DC 0036  
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHINGTON DC 0200  
RUCPDOC/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC  
RUEAAIA/CIA WASHDC 0320  
RUEKJCS/DIA WASHDC 0316  
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STATE FOR INR/R/MR, EAP/PA, AND EAP/PD  
STATE FOR EAP/CM, OES, AND EB  
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TAGS: SENV PGOV PREL ECPS CH

SUBJECT: CLIMATE CHANGE - GUANGZHOU STILL NOT FEELING THE HEAT

**11.** (SBU) Summary: A trio of obstacles -- public indifference, media apathy and government double-speak -- seem to be making it more difficult for climate change issues to gain traction in this south China megacity. According to local newspaper reporters, Guangzhou residents are largely unaware of and uninterested in the underlying causes or potentially disastrous impacts of climate change. Media coverage is limited to publicizing the results of highly technical scientific reports, rebroadcasting generic official statements calling for greater action on climate change, or dissemination of government propaganda that blames developed countries for the climate change problem. Cooperation between U.S. and Chinese environment and meteorology experts on joint research projects and local forums and workshops provide good opportunities for climate change reporting, according to journalists. Joint training programs and information exchange could also strengthen capacity for climate change reporting and understanding in both countries. End Summary.

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TEMPERATURES RISING BUT LEVEL OF CONCERN STILL LOW  
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**12.** (SBU) Reporters from three local newspapers agreed at a recent meeting with ESTHoff that overall public awareness in Guangzhou regarding climate change is low. While many residents are vaguely aware that global temperatures are rising, few understand or are concerned about the underlying causes or projected impacts of climate change, according to Zhao Anran (protect) of the Information Times. Even when residents are exposed to reports describing climate change disaster scenarios, few link these reports to their daily lives or feel pressure to change lifestyle habits. A reporter from Guangzhou Daily added that most residents are primarily concerned with issues that have immediate relevance to their individual economic situation and are relatively uninterested in broader less direct long-term "public interest" issues like climate change.

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MEDIA UNDERSTAND ROLE BUT COVERAGE IS LINKED TO DEMAND  
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**13.** (SBU) The bulk of local media coverage of climate change issues can be divided into two categories, according to Zhu Yong of Southern Metropolis Daily. One is the effort to make public the results of highly technical scientific reports on different aspects

of climate change, which due to their technical nature are inaccessible for the average reader. The second category of coverage consists of broadcasting "soft calls" made by government officials to encourage greater action on climate change, appeals which one reporter characterized as "empty words that bore the public." (Comment: A third category not mentioned by the journalists consists of government propaganda aimed at evading responsibility for reducing carbon emissions and assigning blame for climate change almost exclusively to the U.S. and other developed countries. End Comment.)

¶14. (SBU) Convincing the media of their critical role in increasing climate change awareness is not the challenge, according to a reporter from the Guangzhou Daily. The real difficulty is overcoming low levels of public interest in seemingly remote climate change issues like melting glaciers and polar ice caps. Zhao added that most residents are primarily concerned with economic conditions or social welfare issues that affect them on a daily basis, which translates into high demand for media coverage on these topics. So long as readers remain primarily interested in economic and social issues with immediate relevance, climate change issues will receive relatively little attention, the reporters said.

¶15. (SBU) In light of these obstacles, all three journalists highlighted the need for creativity in making climate change issues interesting to the average reader. As an example, one reporter pointed to an article recently printed on the front page of the Guangzhou Daily that tells the story of an underwater meeting held by the Maldives' president and cabinet to push for a stronger climate change agreement in Copenhagen. This type of story, according to the reporter, catches the public interest and at the

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same time gets out an important message about the urgency of the climate change issue. The reporter added that Hollywood should make more movies like "The Day After Tomorrow" to draw the public's attention to the potential catastrophic consequences of inaction on climate change. (Comment: Although the reporters claimed to be cognizant of the media's role in raising public awareness, quips about Hollywood movies and comments about the irrelevance of climate change issues suggests the reporters did not see it as their responsibility to increase the public's understanding of the urgency of the climate change issue. End Comment.)

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COOPERATION, JOINT RESEARCH GOOD MATERIAL FOR NEWS STORIES  
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¶16. (SBU) "Media report the news and any reporting done on climate change needs to be linked to a news item." This line was repeated several times by journalists at the meeting. When asked what would qualify as climate change "news," Zhu of Southern Metropolis said that cooperation between U.S. and Chinese environment or meteorology experts on a joint research project would be one example of a newsworthy item. A locally-hosted forum on a given climate change topic would also provide journalists with the opportunity to report on climate change issues, according to Zhu.

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TRAINING AND INFORMATION EXCHANGE WOULD BE BENEFICIAL  
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¶17. (SBU) Low demand for climate change reporting translates into a lack of specialized knowledge on climate change topics for many local reporters. Journalists in Guangzhou acknowledged that joint training workshops and information exchanges with foreign media would help them improve their climate change reporting skills. One of the reporters added that a recent workshop on the links between climate change and public health, hosted for the media as part of the Climate Cool program at the British Council, had been particularly useful. (Note: In a recent meeting with June Zhong, Program Manager for Climate Cool, Zhong said that the program sponsored media forums on climate change topics on a quarterly basis. Recent forums covered topics such as low carbon development, climate change and international negotiation, and sustainable energy. End Note.)

¶ 8. (SBU) Comment: According to the Paris Declaration on Broadcast Media and Climate Change, public awareness of the need for urgent action on climate change is the lynchpin of international efforts to mitigate its negative impacts, and the media plays a critical role in raising overall awareness and stimulating policy debate on options for mitigation and adaptation. Increased collaboration between U.S. and Chinese media professionals -- e.g., joint training on the technical aspects of climate change or exchanging best practices for making climate change issues relevant to people with different education levels and cultural backgrounds -- would increase capacity for quality climate change reporting on both sides. At the same time, U.S. efforts to foster greater cooperation between media professionals in both countries would tangibly demonstrate our commitment to working together with China to combat climate change by tackling the challenge of public awareness while also promoting greater understanding and, ideally, acceptance of U.S. policies. End Comment.

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